ADMINISTRATION DEFENDS CHOICE TO BLOCK WEBSITE

written by *The Bison* | March 3, 2011

Written by Sarah J Kyle

In chapel Thursday morning, President David B. Burks defended Harding University's decision to censor an underground student website, citing his personal feelings and a formal statement by the university.

Harding came under scrutiny by several blogs and social media sites Wednesday afternoon after deciding to block the website, HUQueerPress.com.

The e-zine, which was also distributed to several students in the dormitories in the form of a pamphlet, detailed the anonymous experiences of gay and lesbian students at Harding.

HUQueerPress.com was blocked on campus at about 4 p.m. Wednesday. The site included testimonials from current and former students, some of which included explicit sexual detail and offensive language.

In Thursday morning's statement, Burks reminded students that sexual immorality of any kind, whether heterosexual or homosexual, was prohibited at Harding, citing pg. 11 of the Harding University Student Handbook.

"Harding University holds to the biblical principle that sexual relationships are unacceptable to God outside the context of marriage," Burks quoted. "Sexual immorality in any form will result in suspension from the university."

In spite of the university's regulations, several students, former students and the national LGBT community have protested the actions, declaring them unconstitutional. On Wednesday afternoon, shortly after Harding blocked the site due to "objectionable material," a petition was posted on Change.org to "Tell Harding University: Don't Silence LGBT Students."

By Thursday morning, the site had more than 200 signatures from Harding students and LGBT advocates.

Senior political science major Sarah Everett, who signed the petition Wednesday night, said censoring the site prevents discussion about how Christians should view same-sex attraction.

"Christ listened to the marginalized,the outcast, and had nothing but compassion for them," Everett said. "The writers of this publication don't feel safe speaking their minds and hearts publicly. This is a failure of the institution."Section 12, pg.36, of the Student Handbook, states that any literature displayed or distributed on university-controlled property must be approved by the Office of Student Life, cannot be libelous or obscene and must state the name of the sponsoring organization.

Burks said it is important for students to know that the site was blocked due to its violation of Harding's handbook and purpose.

"I think it is important for you to know that we are not trying to control your thinking on this," Burks said. "But it was important for us to block the website because of what it says about Harding, who we are and what we believe."

Burks added that he also found the site objectionable.

"I personally found the website to be offensive and degrading," Burks said. "I won't even publicly speak the web address, not because I think I can keep it from you, but because the address itself is offensive to me.

While the postings appear to be sincere and heartfelt, several were vulgar and profane by anyone's standards, and the rhetoric is often very extreme."

Sophomore social work major Mindy Gross heard about the situation on Twitter Wednesday afternoon. Gross said that while Harding had justification to block the site according to the handbook, the message detailing the censoring was not clear, leaving the university's intentions unknown.

"If you're accessing the Internet through Harding's network, they control it,"Gross said. "I just feel they didn't go about it in the best manner. The way that they did it left their intentions ambiguous. If they did it to follow through with the Harding handbook, that's legitimate; from an outsider's point of view, it could be seen as censoring them because they disagreed."

Sophomore broadcast journalism major Grant Harris said he believed Harding was completely justified in censoring the website and that he supported Burks' announcement.

"He showed that the handbook was not biased toward orientation, gave Biblical reasons for why homosexuality is an issue and presented things in a dignified manner," Harris said. "He has the rules on his side. No one should be surprised that Harding has a problem with this stuff. I think it was fully within their rights as a private university."

Burks concluded his address by citing his biblical views on the matter, responding to the website's use of scriptural context to support homosexuality.

"I want to reaffirm that I believe that the Bible teaches that homosexual behavior is sinful — see Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6," Burks said."What is acceptable and holy in the sight of God is not determined by the societal norms or democratic voting."

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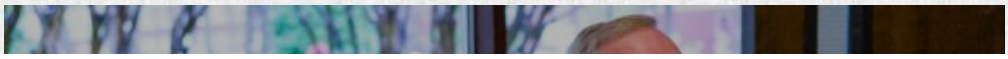

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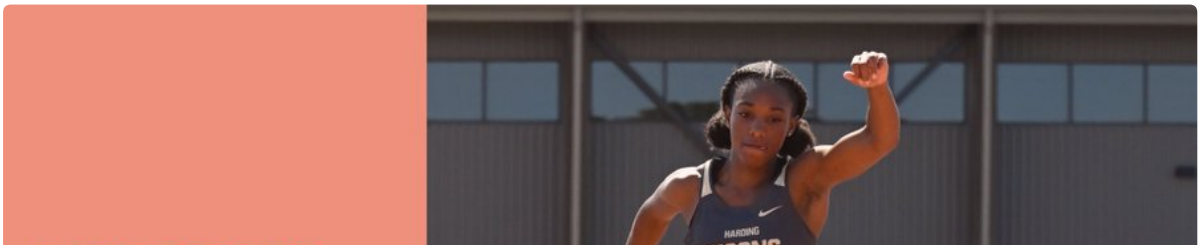
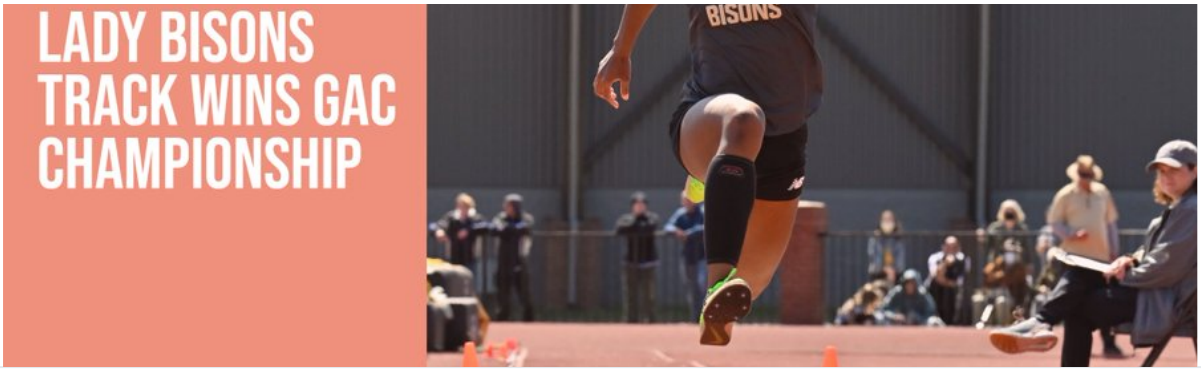
Full story: thelink.harding.edu/the-bison/2021…





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